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Technical and Vocational Education for Zimbabwe's Rural Development: Issues and Concerns

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to highlight some issues and concerns in the Zimbabwean educational system in general, and in particular, issues and concerns within the purview for technical and vocational education. The paper will further provoke debate within the context of technical and vocational education as a strategy geared for rural development. The paper, therefore, will analyse policies and practices and will further examine their implications, with a view to making recommendations for directing technical and vocational education towards rural development in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Many years after independence, multi-dimensional questions are still being asked by some academics and some policy makers about the type of technical and vocational education in Zimbabwe. Is it a system directed to meet the demands of the urban population only? How about the rural people? Are they forgotten in the process? What is the fundamental role of technical and vocational education in rural development? As a country how can Zimbabwe strengthen its capacity to improve the lives of people in the rural areas through technical and vocational programmes? Within the scenario of this host of questions, it would appear that the need for state intervention, debate and action-research, should be on the agenda of educational planners and educators of technical and vocational programmes.

Conceptual background

The kick-off point to this debate should necessitate an attempt to furnish an appropriate definition of technical and vocational education within the context of creating a vision for development. According to the UNESCO Glossary of Terms (1979), technical education is defined as the development of skills and knowledge through scientific means and with a view towards practical application. On the other hand, a vocation, in terms of *The Concise English Dictionary* (1986), is a call of

sense of fitness to follow a particular career of occupation. It therefore follows that vocational education is the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for a particular job ranging from a semi-skilled occupation to a skilled trade and technician level of training. Zimbabwe, like most developing countries, tends to combine both technical education (which has a scientific and a mathematical base), with vocational education (which is more inclined towards manipulative skills), hence, the term vocational and technical education.

According to this broad conceptual analysis of technical and vocational education, it may be inferred that this form of education derives its success from learning packages that are geared towards mastery of skills and a demonstration of competences. Predictably, the users and beneficiaries of this mode of education in Zimbabwe should be largely, commercial industrialists, medical technologists and engineering industrialist. The question still remains: How about the rural folks and those in the so-called growth points? Is there any deliberate attempt for a vigorous policy of technical and vocational education for them?

Issues of education and employment

Estimates indicate that every year the Zimbabwe is producing over 300 000 'O' level school leavers (UNESCO, (2000); The World Bank, 1993), and out of these, some are gainfully engaged in tertiary institutions or in the labour market and others are absorbed into the informal sector. Out of the 300 000 school leavers, those who do not possess 5 'O' levels are generally considered by society as having attained a low level education. Draw-backs of a low level education have been pointed out by Brown and Tomori (1979) as a handicap to work performance and as hampering a citizen's chances of contributing to nation building, in family, community productivity and civic matters and consequently to slow, if any, progress of society.

Following the rightful democratization of formal education, which meets an investment of millions of dollars in government fiscus, Zimbabwe is caught up in a serious problem of unemployment. Indeed,

the problem of unemployed school leavers and that of unoccupied school drop-outs has reached such high proportions that it is causing grave concern to serious policy makers and ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe.

The scenario appears to suggest that perhaps the education system is preparing the young people for a future that is not open to all of them. Meanwhile, the country's economy creates a few new jobs per year, whilst more than 200 000 young 'O' level certificate holders are unable to enrol for tertiary education or enter the job market. What appears to worsen this manpower wastage is the school drop-out rate, which appears to take an upward trend as the education system inversely expands.

Reference is made to the table below:

Table 1

Drop Out Rates for Secondary Pupils Who Enrol into Form I but Do Not Reach Form IV

Year enrolled	Form I enrolments	Form 4 enrolments (4 years later)	Dropouts Number	%
1980		12,926		
1981		15,323		
1982	18,352	15,772	2,580	14%
1983	22,201	24,509	2,308	10%
1984	83,491	71,014	12,477	15%
1985	97,752	89,517	8,235	8%
1986	110,725	97,900	12,825	12%
1987	138,904	113,900	25,004	18%
1988	148,002	112,900	35,102	24%
1989	166,200	117,100	49,100	30%
1990	202,900	123,800	79,100	39%
1991	211,800	153,700	58,100	27%
1992	200,700	137,900	62,800	31%
1993	192,800	133,200	59,600	31%
1994	195,700	136,900	58,800	30%
1995	180,400	140,635	39,765	22%
1996	174,000	143,588	30,412	17%
1997	195,500	154,033	41,467	21%
1998	210,376	164,540	45,836	22%
1999	218,320	172,183	46,137	21%
2000	229,595	178,727	50,868	22%
2001	236,469	185,730	50,739	21%
2002	223,715	175,326	48,389	22%
2003	228,571	159,842	68,729	30%
2004	231,013	173,706	57,307	25%
TOTAL	3,917,486	2,976,422	941,064	24%
AVERAGE	170,325	129,410	40,916	24%

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture Secretary's Report, Zengeya, M.A. and Central Statistical Office: Education Reports

As it is evident from Table 1, of the 231 013 pupils that enrolled for form one in 2004, 57 307 or 25% did not sit for their ordinary levels in 2007 because they had dropped out of school. From the above data, it can be inferred that altogether there are more than a quarter of a million very able bodied youths who are unoccupied.

The state of affairs outlined above clearly suggests the need for another system of education that will supplement and complement the existing one. Therefore, the challenge for educationalists and policy makers is to unlock some components from the present education system, and to adapt them to other, perhaps, less glamorous but viable sectors of the economy, hence Technical and Vocational Education for Rural Development.

Financial developments in education

According to available statistics, whilst enrolments in technical tertiary institutions have increased from 3 469 in 1980 to 15 233 in 2004 and while university education has increased its enrolment from 2 240 in 1980 to 46 712 in 2004 (UNICEF, 1991; Government of Zimbabwe, 2005; Zengeya, 2007), the growth of the system has continued to entail huge financial investments. National University of Science and Technology, Africa University, Solusi University, Midland State University and other state and private universities have emerged during the past years but the extent to which absorptive capacities have alleviated the need for university education is perhaps too early to assess. The education vote, which constitutes about a quarter of the national budget, has increased nearly eight fold since 1980.

Despite this huge financial investment, education is not universal. Very little attention has been given to the provision of education to workers' communities in commercial farming areas. According to Dorsey et al. (1991), the majority of farm works' children do not attend school.

According to the Central Statistical Office (1993), Tech-Voc education has only been allocated approximately 1/20 of the total budget allocated

to education, when in fact it is more expensive; it demands heavy equipmentation and it requires technically skilled teachers. Further, studies by Mbizvo (1994) on Zimbabwe's Tech-Voc Education between 1985 and 1990, clearly shows that the system was affected by the lack of active co-operation and participation between government and industry which should have been effected by College Advisory Councils. hence a financial loss to government.

Challenges for technical and vocational education

Certainly, Zimbabwe has made great strides in education in respect of availability and accessibility. It is de facto that in the colonial past, education was a privilege of the few, today it is the right of many. Paradoxically however, the system has become the victim of its own success if one looks at the fact that for example in 1987, there were 100 000 secondary school leavers, competing for between 10 000 and 20 000 jobs on the market (Stoneman et al., 1989). Figures of university graduates who fail to secure suitable employment are not easily available, however, it is estimated that about 10% of the 2 000 annual crop of graduates are unable to secure suitable employment and they end up getting employed as temporary school teachers. Wouldn't this scenario suggest to us that both educational planners and academicians must re-visit their agenda and conceptualise Voc-Tech Education for Rural Development so that the majority of our young people are given appropriate skills-based training within their own rural environment and continue to mobilize themselves in their own setting until they become productive. These programmes must be site-specific. Such programmes have the big advantage of improving the standard of living of people in the rural areas, and perhaps, reduce urban migration which appears to pose a big problem for Zimbabwe. It goes without saying that an ever increasing number of young rural people are forced to migrate to the nearest town because there are no appropriate skills centres to provide meaningful technical and vocational education.

The essence of this paper, therefore, is to suggest a Triangular Model approach as a mode of Voc-Tech Education for the rural people through some form of affirmative action, if our vision is geared towards rural development.

Triangular Curriculum Structure

Technical and Vocational
Skills training (*integrating
Theory and Practice*)

Simulation Production Setting
(*incorporating compulsory
numeracy and 'O' level
enterprise creation skills*)

Basic Academic Studies
(*incorporating literacy, business
studies and subjects/ NFC
subjects*)

Given the incredible success story of our formal educational system in terms of the rapid expansion after independence, and further acknowledging the impressive growth of Voc-Tech Education in Zimbabwe from only 2 Polytechnics in 1980 to 9 technical colleges and 2 vocational training centres by 1990; it is rather sad to note that there has not been any deliberate coherent and systematic policy on Voc-Tech Education for rural development. The so-called Youth Centres are no more. Perhaps they had a political agenda but what we need is an educational agenda for our rural people. We are all aware that approximately 70% of Zimbabwean population lives in the rural areas yet. However, if one were to examine the Manpower Planning and Development Act Number 23 of 1994 (Ministry of Higher Education) and the Education Act Number 5 of 1987 (Ministry of Education), one will soon discover that both Acts are silent about the whole question of skills-based training for the rural areas or Voc-Tech Education for rural development.

I believe it is true that we are certainly in a hurry to produce skilled manpower to sustain our economy and industrial base but perhaps we may now need a complete new culture of Voc-Tech Education, a culture that cuts across the entire population. Lessons could be drawn from the Japanese educational culture which embodies what is called '*juku*', a culture that emphasizes an obsession and a contemporary zest for learning applied education (Cantor, 2006). In Japan, Hitachi Institute of Technology situated in the City of Hitachi will focus on hi-tech technology whereas in the outskirts like Yokohama the learning of applied education is Yokohama oriented. This culture pivots on the so-called '*miscellaneous schools*' for different areas (Cantor, 2006).

Recommendations

In preparation for the 21st Century, is it not possible for Zimbabwe to launch a 'skills supermarket' approach which is area specific? Is it not possible to develop skill-based programmes for bee-keeping, fishing, roof-thatching within the purview of resources available and effective resources management for the rural people and amongst the rural people? Is it not possible to offer vocational skills in grinding-mill maintenance, borehole repair and maintenance, scotch-cart building for rural youths? Or perhaps offer vocational skills in leather-works, textile printing, pottery, basketry and weaving for the rural people in well organized and well managed 'skills supermarkets'? This could be integrated with conservation studies, water conservation, management of trees, prevention of soil erosion, etc.

An integrated Triangular Curriculum Structure as shown in this paper could perhaps take the shape of Technical and Vocational Education for the young rural people. So far the current system of Polytechnics and Technical Colleges is producing technicians for the private sector, artisans, fitters and turners for the mines, whilst universities are producing doctors and lawyers but as Julius Nyerere (1967) warns that most of our people will never be any of these things. It therefore seems appropriate to suggest that we think in other terms vis-a-vis technical and vocational education for Zimbabwe's rural development. Perhaps this could Zimbabwe's answer to urban migration, street kids, etc.

If we are serious about rural development, then it should be possible to give skills based training for self-sustenance whilst addressing the unique needs of a particular locality and synchronizing that with the resources of that locality. People living in Kariba could be taught proper knowledge and applied education in fishing skills in the form of fishery studies and water technology, whilst people living in Chimanimani could learn wood technology, furniture making, and proper grass-roofing or thatching skills.

Finally, it is now time to seriously make things happen in terms of empowering the rural folks, making life exciting in the rural areas and enabling them to survive in their won environment through some affirmative action geared towards Vocational and Technical Education for Rural Development.

Conclusion

This paper therefore challenges educational planners and academics to revisit the agenda on Technical and Vocational Education and make it more embracing and holistic to the macro demands. The argument appears to be supported by Nyagura (1986) who maintains in the paper. *An overview of curricular issues in Zimbabwe:*

...the education systems should provide ample opportunities for individuals to develop their potential to learn, respond to new situations and adapt to social change; participate effectively in the nation's political, social and cultural transformation, and improve the productive capacity of the nation in all areas of economic activity.

In conclusion, I am reminded of the words of Shakespeare in Julius Caesar, when Brutus says that there is a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries. On such a full sea are we now afloat, and must take the current when it serves, or lose our venture. The critical issue that appears to emerge is the need for a system geared towards the rural Community, hence Technical and Vocational Education for Zimbabwe's Rural Development.

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